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Prologue

A half-moon glowed on the smooth granite boulders, turning them silver. The silence was broken only by the ripple of water from the swift black river and the whisper of trees in the forest beyond.

There was a stirring in the shadows, and from all around lithe dark shapes crept stealthily over the rocks. Unsheathed claws glinted in the moonlight. Wary eyes flashed like amber. And then, as if on a silent signal, the creatures leaped at each other, and suddenly the rocks were alive with wrestling, screeching cats.

At the center of the frenzy of fur and claws, a massive dark tabby pinned a bracken-colored tom to the ground and drew his head up triumphantly.

"Oakheart!" the tabby growled. "How dare you hunt in our territory? The Sunningrocks belong to ThunderClan!"

"After tonight Tigerclaw, this will be just another RiverClan hunting ground!" the bracken-colored tom spat back.

A warning yowl came from the shore, shrill and anxious.

"Look out! More RiverClan warriors are coming!"

Tigerclaw turned to see sleek wet bodies sliding out of the water below the rocks. The drenched RiverClan warriors bounded silently up the shore and hurled themselves into battle without even stopping to shake the water from their fur.

The dark tabby glared down at Oakheart. "You may swim like otters, but you and your warriors do not belong in this forest!" He drew back his lips and showed his teeth as the cat struggled beneath him.

The desperate scream of a ThunderClan she-cat rose above the clamor. A wiry RiverClan tom had pinned the brown warrior flat on

her belly. Now he lunged toward her neck with jaws still dripping from his swim across the river.
Tigerclaw heard the cry and let go of Oakheart. With a mighty leap, he knocked the enemy warrior away from the she-cat.

"Quick Mousefur, run!" he ordered, before turning on the RiverClan tom who had threatened her. Mousefur scrambled to her paws, wincing from a deep gash on her shoulder, and raced away.

Behind her, Tigerclaw spat with rage as the RiverClan tom sliced open his nose. Blood blinded him for an instant, but he lunged forward regardless and sank his teeth into the hind leg of his enemy. The RiverClan cat squealed and struggled free.

"Tigerclaw!" The yowl came from a warrior with a tail as red as fox fur. "This is useless! There are too many RiverClan warriors!"
"No Redtail. ThunderClan will never be beaten!" Tigerclaw yowled back, leaping to Redtail's side. "This is our territory!"

Blood was welling around this broad black muzzle, and he shook his head impatiently scattering scarlet drops onto the rocks.
"ThunderClan will honor your courage, Tigerclaw, but we cannot afford to lose any more of our warriors," Redtail urged.

"Bluestar would never expect her warriors to fight against these impossible odds. We will have another chance to avenge this defeat." He met Tigerclaw's amber-gaze steadily, then reared away and sprang onto a boulder at the edge of the trees.
"Retreat ThunderClan! Retreat!" he yowled. At once his warriors squirmed and struggled away from their opponents. Spitting and snarling, they backed toward Redtail. for a heartbeat the RiverClan cats looked confused. Was this battle so easily won?

Then Oakheart yowled a jubilant cry. As soon as they heard him, the RiverClan warriors raised their voices and joined their deputy in caterwauling their victory. Redtail looked down at his warriors. With a flick of his tail, he gave the signal and the ThunderClan cats dived down the far side of the Sunningrocks, then disappeared into the trees.

Tigerclaw followed last. He hesitated at the edge of the forest and

glanced back at the bloodstained battlefield. His face was grim, and his eyes furious slits. Then he leaped after his Clan into the silent forest.

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The ThunderClan cats lowered their heads as they sat around the deputy's dead body, his dark tortoiseshell fur matted with red, shiny blood. Bluestar jumped down from her spot on a rock and joined her Clanmates.
"Redtail was a brave warrior. His loyalty to ThunderClan could never be doubted."

A pale ginger she-cat padded up to her father's body along with a dark brown tabby. A dark tortoiseshell leaned down, turning her ear to listen for even the faintest breath of life.
Then the supposed dead tom twitched! Redtail's amber eyes flung open, his breath so rapid that he could hyperventilate. Cats' voices were drowned out by the loud ringing in Redtail's ears.

As he glanced around, his gaze stopped at a blurry image of bluish-gray. *Bluestar.*
Turning his head, he scanned his gasping and wide-eyed Clanmates until his eyes locked on a dark brown tabby with amber eyes.
"Murderer!" Fury filling him to the brim, Redtail thrust himself at his attacker!
Tigerclaw flung Redtail back with a powerful throw and the dark tortoiseshell slammed into the Highrock.

Wheezing, the deputy shakily lifted his throbbing head. Willowpelt and Bluestar jumped in between the two warriors as Tigerclaw was about to go for another attack.
"Enough!" Bluestar snapped. Looking back at her deputy, she asked, "Redtail... are you okay?"

Just As I Left Them

Redtail watched as Tigerclaw left the camp, outlawed from the Warrior Code and the safety of the Clan. Redtail swallowed greedily.

I don't owe him anything, not anymore.

As the Clan dispersed, a flame-colored cat, no less bigger than a nine moon old apprentice, approached.

"Hi," he said.

"Hello. Firepaw, right?" Redtail guessed.

Firepaw nodded. "Yeah, that's me. And you're Redtail, Sandpaw's father."

The ThunderClan cat gave a nod of his head. "I was surprised that Bluestar allowed a kittypet into the Clan. I shall watch your progress with interest."

Leaving the apprentice, Redtail made his way across the clearing of the camp and entered the medicine cat's den. "Spottedleaf?" he called.

A dark tortoiseshell thrust her head out of a crack in the rock wall. "Redtail," Spottedleaf greeted her brother. "What can I do for you?"

Redtail lifted his head to reveal the gash that Tigerclaw gave him when he tried to take his life. "Have you got anything for this bite on my neck?"

After sniffing it, his sister turned and got some marigold.

"There," purred the medicine cat after she applied the poultice. She gave Redtail a lick on his ear, and he flicked his tail as he left.

Turning his head, Redtail saw Whitestorm scolding Sandpaw, who

just called the new apprentice a kittypet. Redtail looked to his left to see Bluestar coming over to him, her fur tinted with silver in the moonlight.

"Bluestar... I... I'm sorry." The tom gulped, now he would have to tell his leader the thing he feared.

Bluestar tilted her head in confusion. "Whatever for?"

"At the battle with RiverClan, I was the one who killed Oakheart."

Bluestar's eyes grew wide but then went back to normal. "You killed Oakheart...?"

Hanging his head in shame, Redtail nodded.

"Yes. It was an accident. But he... he was going to hurt Ravenpaw!"

"I see... Thank you for telling me about this Redtail."
After giving a flick of his tail, the deputy made his way to the warrior den. Settling himself in his nest, he glanced around at his sleeping Clanmates.

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"So how is he?" Redtail asked. Spottedleaf licked the black apprentice's wounds.

"Ravenpaw can't continue his training until his wound gets better," the she-cat meowed. Looking at Ravenpaw, the deputy thanked StarClan that he sent him away when he did. His wounds would've been a lot worse.

Getting up, the senior warrior left the medicine cat den and walked over Dustpaw.

"Dustpaw, we're going to show Firepaw the territory today," said the dark tortoiseshell.

The brown tabby's amber eyes narrowed. "That kittypet?" he asked.
"Dustpaw." Redtail hissed, then lifted his head to look at the apprentice den and remembered Firepaw and Graypaw.

"Graypaw, Firepaw? Training is about to start."

Soon, the two toms emerged from the den. Redtail led the way, with Lionheart, Dustpaw, Firepaw and Graypaw following him.

Rising Storm

The sun pooled onto the floor of the ThunderClan clearing, making it look like sweet golden honey. A starling gave a chirp before launching itself off the branch it perched on. A dark tortoiseshell fluffed out his fur, his amber eyes squinting. Sitting under the Highrock, he turned his attention to a white tom coming out of the warrior den.

Forcing himself to his paws, the deputy stepped out of the cool shade and into the scorching sunlight.
"Dear StarClan, why is it so hot?" Redtail asked himself as he came closer to the warrior.
Whitestorm turned his attention to his Clanmate, his yellow eyes friendly. "Oh, hi Redtail. Something I can help you with?"

"Actually, yes," the tortoiseshell replied. "Do you know what's going on with Bluestar?"
Ever since Tigerclaw's betrayal, Lionheart and Spottedleaf's deaths, and the disappearance of the prey, the ThunderClan leader rarely came out of her den.
The senior warrior slowly shook his mighty head. "No, I'm sorry Redtail," he meowed.

Ears drooping, Redtail said goodbye to Whitestorm and watched him as he left to meet his apprentice Brightpaw.
"Redtail!" Turning to the sound of his name, he glanced about until his amber eyes settled on a white and black tom.
"Swiftpaw," Redtail mewed. "What are you doing?"
The apprentice glared at him with eyes full of hate.
"Do you know when my warrior ceremony is?" he spat. The deputy purred as he got to eye level with Swiftpaw.

"Soon," he promised. "In the meantime, you can go out with Longtail on a hunting patrol."
Looking away, the white and black apprentice gave a scoff and stormed away from Redtail. Shaking his head, the tom padded over to Bluestar's den. Stopping by the entrance, he took a breath.

"Bluestar?" he called. The ThunderClan cat was about to enter when a flame-colored tom stepped out. Nodding his head to Fireheart, he heard his leader permit him to enter her den. The old she-cat was tucked away at the back of her den, in her moss nest and facing toward the wall.
The dark tortoiseshell cleared his throat. "Bluestar? I have a question."

"And what is that?" Her voice was dry and harsh, but Redtail still gained the strength to speak. "Swiftpaw is wondering when his and Brightpaw's warrior ceremonies are."
Bluestar didn't answer right away. Instead, she forced herself to sit up.

"You seem like the kind of cat who would betray me, Redtail," she hissed. Taken back by her words, the deputy shook his head.
"Never," he promised. "I would never betray you Bluestar." Redtail felt his heart clench.
Does Bluestar really think I would betray her?
Dipping his head, the deputy left the Highrock.

Redtail watched as a dark gray cat swam across the river and Fireheart thrust himself forward. As the tom lifted himself out of the river, not even stopping to shake the water off his pelt.
"Graystripe!" the flame-colored tom purred. Redtail flicked his ginger tail, signaling the patrol to go on without them.

"Fireheart," Redtail snapped, then flicked his tail in the direction of the ThunderClan patrol as a small, black cat came up to them.
"Ravenwing, take Sandstorm and Longtail to the Thunderpath and see if ShadowClan have been in our territory."

Ravenwing raced away from the deputy, and after, Redtail turned his attention back to Fireheart as the two began to run after the patrol.

You're the Future of ThunderClan

Redtail jumped into the water, the cold liquid turning his dark brown fur black. He pulled himself through the rushing water, trying desperately to get to his leader.
"Bluestar!" he called. The deputy got pulled down by the waves, only to resurface. Taking a breath, he dove under the water and tried to open his eyes.

The darkish blue water under the surface was all Redtail could see. His eyes hurting, he broke through the clashes waves again.
"Redtail!" the dark tortoiseshell looked up to see Fireheart on the cliff of the gorge, looking panicked. The tom caught a glimpse of dark blue-gray fur and his amber eyes widened. Bluestar!

Without thinking, Redtail dove back under the water, swimming deeper into the depths. Forgetting about the water filling his mouth, Redtail grabbed the she-cat's scruff with his teeth and started to swim up. Soon, they surfaced. Redtail resisted the urge to cough and dragged Bluestar toward the bank.

Fireheart helped the tom get their leader away from the shore. Exhaustion tugged at Redtail and he panted from his battle with the currents. Feeling a wave of dizziness overtake him, he collapsed to the ground and his vision went pitch black.

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A cat stirred in his sleep, his whiskers twitching. Warm sunlight landed on his pelt, causing the pleasant feeling to spread through his body. Slowly, his eyes met gray dappled fur and he looked up.
"Brindleface?"
The ThunderClan cat's head jolted in his direction.

"Redtail, you're awake!" Brindleface purred. The warrior gave her mate a lick on his cheek. The dark tortoiseshell tom forced himself

to his paws and Brindleface followed him out of the leader's den. Redtail squinted his eyes as they stepped into the sunlight, cats turning their attention to their deputy.

Fireheart made his way to Redtail as soon as he had caught sight of him.
"Redtail, you're awake. *Finally!*"
Giving his paw a lick, the dark tom flicked his ear. "What happened to Bluestar?"
Fireheart hesitated, his ears down. "She... She joined StarClan."